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Russia May Switch to Chinese Pork from European

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Russia is considering importing pork from China to compensate for the loss of European pork banned in the beginning of January because of an outburst of African Swine Fever, the Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance, Rosselkhoznadzor, said.

"We have been made an offer from the Chinese side, but we are still considering it. A delegation of Russian, Kazakh and Belarussian inspectors is going to visit China to find out if the quality of the meat is good enough and meets our criteria," said Alexei Alekseenko, a spokesman for Rosselkhoznadzor. He added that it was still hard to say when the trip to China could take place, as the inspectors currently have a busy schedule.

Russia is a member of a customs union with Kazakhstan and Belarus, which means that the three neighbors have the same import and export regulations.

Alekseenko added that China proposed nine enterprises to be included in the list of potential

exporters.

But, he said, the quality of Chinese pork was still a key issue. China has been struggling to stamp out different animal diseases within its territory. The latest case occurred in the beginning of March, when more than 100 decaying bodies of pigs were found in a river in the eastern province of Jiangxi. No official explanation of the accident has been made public so far.

Finding an alternative importer is a hard task for Russia, analyst Daniil Hotko from the Institute for the Agricultural Market Studies, or IKAR, said.

"The Russian pork market is still highly dependent on imports," Hotko said. According to him, Russia imported 1 million tons of pork in 2013.

The ban on European pork caused by African Swine Fever, a disease which is lethal for pigs but does not affect humans, has dealt a blow to the Russian market, as before the ban Russia imported more than half of the meat it consumed from European Union member states. The main suppliers were Denmark, Spain and Germany. And now the country has to increase imports from Canada and Brazil.

Rosselkhoznadzor and watchdog Rospotrebnadzor, which is responsible for health and consumer rights, have been repeatedly accused of making politically motivated decisions.

In 2012 Rospotrebnadzor banned Ukrainian cheese during a period of political tensions between the two countries. In 2012 Rospotrebnadzor also banned imports of dairy and meat products from Lithuania and canned goods from Poland, actions said to be connected to the turmoil in relations between these countries and Russia.

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